

## **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

### **Oil Spill Response Plan for Florida Manatees**

#### **Talking Points – For Use by All**

- Florida manatee wildlife plans are in place and being used by responders throughout the current and potential oil spill impact areas.
- These plans were developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) in close coordination with State agencies and the Marine Mammal Stranding Response Network partners.
- The plans provide the framework and specific actions response managers and field response teams are to take should a Florida manatee be observed in an oil-impacted area or an area expected to be oiled.
- Rescue supplies are cached in the upper Gulf of Mexico region with additional supplies are being staged in Florida.
- Weather permitting, daily aerial flights survey oiled, potentially oiled and areas forecasted to be oiled in search of impacted wildlife, including the Florida manatee. Additionally, specific manatee aerial survey flights are being flown in coastal areas of Florida, AL, MS and eventually LA.
- Sightings are reported to the wildlife hotlines and qualified responders are dispatched to the area to verify the sighting.
- Verified sightings may trigger a health and behavior assessment by experienced manatee responders from SeaWorld of Orlando (primary) or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- If a manatee is in distress, or there is concern for the welfare of the animal due to encroaching oil, a rescue team, made up of local wildlife paraprofessionals and additional personnel as needed, is deployed to attempt a capture.
- Capture manatees are initially transported to de-oiling locations along the Gulf Coast. Currently there are two such facilities identified: Audubon Aquarium of the Americas in New Orleans, LA and the Institute for Marine Mammals Studies, Gulfport, MS. Additional facilities are also stood up in Florida including: Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park, Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa, and the Miami Seaquarium.
- Once medically cleared, manatees will be transported to a long-term holding facility at Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park.
- Manatees will only be released back into the wild once the pending threat of oil contamination is clear.